

# **A Portrait of Two Honors Students as Young Educators**

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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Thesis Advisor

**Dr. Cheryl Bove**

*Cheryl K. Bove*

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Ball State University

Muncie, Indiana

May 1995

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## Purpose of Thesis

This paper examines the total process of creating and teaching an Honors seminar in contemporary Irish Literature. It will discuss the conception of the initial idea, the evolution of the course, and the research and preparation that was involved. In addition to documenting this preliminary process, this paper also examines the implementation of the course itself into the academic setting, providing detailed evaluations of the course's strengths and weaknesses. Finally, based on the semester's experiences, there are suggestions for future changes that would improve the course as a whole.

## Acknowledgements

The success of this Honors Thesis / Creative Project would not have been possible without the assistance of several people. First of all, we would like to thank Dr. Cheryl Bove for giving us much needed guidance, but also the freedom to make this class our own. As a faculty advisor, Dr. Bove has been a true mentor, and she is someone that we wish to emulate as an educator.

Another faculty member who has been a valuable asset to us is Dr. Lauren Onkey. Dr. Onkey is a new and extremely worthy addition to the Ball State University faculty, and, as resident expert in Irish literature, her door was always open to us. She answered our questions, suggested helpful resources, and even made an appearance as a guest lecturer in the class. We owe a debt of gratitude to her and wish her great success in the future.

Finally, we would like to thank Dr. Arno Wittig, Dean of the Honors College, for giving us the opportunity to teach a college-level seminar as undergraduates. His faith in our ability inspired us, and we hope that he is proud of his decision. This creative project has truly been one of the most educational experiences of our Ball State undergraduate careers.

Ireland has a rich and respected literary tradition. Throughout their education, most students are rarely exposed to Irish writers. Some of the more prominent Irish writers, such as James Joyce, George Bernard Shaw, and William Butler Yeats are included in the typical British literature course. However, these authors are often viewed from a strictly British perspective and are usually assumed to be British, not Irish, writers. This traditional interpretation does not reflect the true nature of the works. It slights the importance and value of the Irish as a literary culture. Great Irish authors such as Sean O'Casey, John Millington Synge, Edna O'Brien, and many others past and present, have made important contributions to the world of literature. It is evident that the ample amount of quality Irish literature merits separate consideration and should be viewed in terms of Irish culture and perspective, not British. For our Honors thesis, we thought that it would be both challenging and stimulating to research, design, and develop a curriculum for an Honors colloquium course dealing with the subject of Irish literature.

Designing a college level course requires a great amount of time and effort. Since we both share a love for Ireland and Irish literature, we decided to collaborate on this project. We felt that working together would allow us to research the subject more thoroughly. We knew that a comprehensive research paper on this topic would have satisfied the Honors thesis requirement; however, we decided to challenge ourselves by pursuing a more creative endeavor. Developing a curriculum for a course on Irish literature, instead of writing the traditional research paper, is

an asset to the university because it provides a unique academic opportunity for students. Not only did it benefit the university, but a project such as this was an invaluable experience for us since we both hope to teach at the university level in the future. As undergraduate students, the opportunity to design and teach a college level course gave us a new perspective on education. This project further honed our research skills and acquainted us with the process of developing a course curriculum.

Obviously, the entire canon of Irish literature cannot be covered with any amount of depth in one semester. One of the things that had to be taken into consideration was the fact that the proposed class would only be two credit hours. Therefore, it was imperative to narrow down the scope of the class. We decided to focus on relatively contemporary literature, spanning from 1900 to the present. We also chose to incorporate both world renowned authors with several lesser known Irish writers. This gave us the opportunity to broaden our own knowledge of Irish literature as well as expose the students to writers they would not normally encounter in other classes.

A project of this extent involves a great deal of initial preparation. We began our research in the summer of 1994. Our first task was to acquaint ourselves with many of the contemporary Irish writers by searching through anthologies and various literary collections. We decided to place a major emphasis on short stories for several reasons. The genre of the short story is very popular among Irish writers. It is a medium that has a rich literary tradition in Ireland. Short stories also gave

us the opportunity to incorporate more authors within the span of one semester.

During this initial research process, we were in separate areas of the country and had access to several different resources. We each compiled lists of possible reading materials and corresponded regularly to keep each other updated on our progress. In addition to looking at the literature, we also researched the political and cultural history of Ireland in order to provide the proper context and background for the literature.

On our return to campus in the fall of 1994, we met at least once a week to plan the class. At this stage, we began to create a rough syllabus. We gave extensive thought to the organization of course material. Through our research, we discovered that many of the stories contained similar themes. Initially, we considered planning the class around only one theme, such as the Irish bildungsroman; However, we felt that a discussion of a wider variety of topics would provide more insight into the Irish experience. Therefore, we organized our syllabus, devoting each class period to a specific topic, such as nationalism, family relationships, and the conflict in Northern Ireland.

At this time, we became acquainted with Dr. Lauren Onkey, a new professor in the English department. Dr. Onkey's area of expertise is Irish literature, and she became an invaluable resource to us. She reviewed our syllabus, made suggestions for additional readings, and provided us with a comprehensive bibliography of resource materials. After evaluating the input of Dr. Onkey and Dr. Cheryl Bove,

our thesis advisor, we finalized the syllabus (Appendix A).

After completing all of the necessary preparations, we were finally ready to actually teach the class. The course was offered as an Honors colloquium in the Spring semester of 1995 under the title of Contemporary Irish Literature. Eleven students registered for the class, which met every Thursday afternoon for approximately two hours. We felt it was necessary to emphasize the informality of this learning environment in order to facilitate free and open discussion. The students commented that they felt very relaxed and at ease, never hesitating to state an opinion. The success of our class was due in large part to the students themselves. We were fortunate to have an intelligent and outgoing group. They made every class period interesting and enjoyable.

Although we likened this course to more of a literary discussion group rather than a traditional lecture class, our lack of teaching experience posed a few problems. We had some difficulty in planning the requirements for the class. Since this was a three hundred level Honors course, we decided to base the grading on attendance/participation, an eight to ten page research paper, and a final oral presentation or creative project. The student responses to these requirements were mixed. Some thought they were adequate or even too little, while others felt that we had required too much. Reviewing these requirements, we have decided that it would have been more advantageous to have the students write two shorter papers dealing specifically with the literature rather than a long research paper. This would

require the students to actually form their own interpretations of the literature, which was the original goal of the research paper. However, we found that most of the students did not incorporate any of the literature into their research paper. This was partially due to the fact that we failed to give specific guidelines with respect to the content of the paper. We wanted to give the students some measure of flexibility, but by doing this, the paper became less of a literary analysis and more of a cultural research paper.

Despite the initial student disgruntlement, the oral presentations/ creative projects went very well. Students seemed excited and interested in their topics, despite their hesitation at speaking in front of the class. We were also pleased with the amount of creativity that the students put into the projects. For example, for their presentation, three students organized an Irish night at their house. The purpose of this night was to expose the other students to traditional Irish food and drink, music, and poetry. One of the students even performed a song in its original Celtic language. All of the students extremely enjoyed this cultural exploration, and the success of this and the rest of the presentations confirms our belief that the presentation requirement benefits the student, as well as educates and entertains the class.

As mentioned earlier in the paper, we relied heavily on the short story as our genre of choice for this course. Although this served our original purpose well, we feel that a greater variety of literature would improve the class. In the future, we



want to include more dramas, as well as possibly an additional novel, to the required readings. We would have liked to have included poetry in this semester's syllabus, but we did not feel confident enough in our knowledge of the Irish poetic tradition to cover it thoroughly. However, in order to fully represent contemporary Irish literature, some attention must be paid to such poets as Eavan Boland and Seamus Heaney.

Although the overall structure and format of the class will remain intact, there are specific changes that would be advantageous to future versions of this course (which are documented in the revised syllabus in Appendix B). This year the course began with a general introduction which included a discussion of the syllabus, guidelines, and policies of the class. We feel that it is important to keep this day informal; however, this would be an opportune time to show the introductory video "Ireland at the Crossroads." This video is a good introduction into some of the issues that are prominent in modern Ireland and appear as themes in much of the literature that we would be reading. This video would also serve as a transition to the next class period which is a lecture on the major issues in Irish history. It is impossible to encapsulate all of Irish history in one class period, but we feel that it is important to cover the major event and movements in Ireland's past to give students a historical foundation for the literature. History, in Ireland, has had such a profound effect on the Irish mindset, that it is imperative to understand the forces that have shaped Ireland as a nation, and, consequently, as a people. Overall, students found

this lecture very informative and a helpful context for the literature. In order to involve the students in this lecture class in the future, we will have each student bring in one event or historical topic that they find interesting. The students will present their assignment to the class, which can lead to further discussion.

The next significant change in the original syllabus is the consolidation of the topics of family relationships, male/female relationships, and sexual issues into one general category of relationships. The primary reasoning behind this alteration is that we thought the specific topics were too constricting from both a student's and educator's perspective. We feel that a broader topic will give the students more opportunities for participation by making them responsible for determining the nature of each relationship on their own. We also see this as a chance to cut some of the weaker stories. In retrospect, some of the chosen stories fit the specific topic, but did not offer much in the way of discussion. However, we also read some of the course's most stimulating literature, such as Edna O'Brien's "Sister Imelda" and "Falling Rocks, Narrowing Road, Cul-de-Sac, Stop" by Sean O'Faolain, which will definitely remain on the syllabus. In the future we would also like to include something by Samuel Beckett, another great Irish author, who deals with human relationships in many of his works.

Another component that would improve the class is increased student involvement. By giving the students more weekly assignments, we hope to encourage participation and guarantee that the students will be prepared for class.

These assignments will also give the students more opportunities for participation points, which are figured into the final grade. Related to this change, in the future we will distribute question for students to think about while reading the weekly assignment. This will also prompt student involvement and give us a basis for class discussion.

One of the aspects of this year's class that worked extremely well was the use of alternative media in addition to the assigned readings. Throughout the course of the semester, we showed several videos which were used to supplement the literature and lecture material. The students found these videos very interesting and informative, as well as a welcome break from the written word. These videos helped the students to better understand the Irish people and culture, by providing a visual picture to put with the information in the literature. When showing a video, as well as with discussing the literature, we felt that it was always important to understand the point of view or bias of the particular piece. We tried to be as objective as possible about certain issues, particularly the conflict in Northern Ireland, and related both sides of the question, giving students the opportunity to formulate their own educated opinions.

Overall, the class was a success. The students were interested in the topic and usually offered enlightening comments. However, the greatest problem we faced was prompting the students to participate in discussion. Sometimes it was obvious that the students had not read the material for that day, but even when they did read,

it was sometimes difficult to encourage them to express their thoughts without spoonfeeding them. As with every class, there were a few students who always came prepared and actively participated in discussion. Despite the occasional blank stares, discussions were generally lively and informative. As discussion leaders, we struggled with the role that we were expected to play. We did not want to monopolize the discussions; however, we sometimes failed to ask directed questions, relying on overly broad generalizations instead. Part of this was due to the fact that we discovered that most students read to finish the assignment rather than reading for critical analysis. This experience effected us not only as instructors but as students as well. As a result, we became better at guiding discussion, and as students, we were more aware of our own instructor's expectations of us.

Another area of concern for us stemmed from our choice of literature. We chose the course materials based on the quality of the work and its relation to the chosen topics for discussion. However, a few students expressed concern over our apparent penchant for female authors. This led some students to believe this was a class in feminist literature, despite the fact that there was an equal number of works from each gender. As educators and as women, this presumption worries us a great deal. We can honestly say that our class was not taught with any overt feminist slant. Issues concerning women were discussed, but as women make up over half of the Irish population, these issues are vital to understanding the Irish way of life. It saddens us that some students feel that inclusion of more than a few token

female authors in a class labels it as "feminist", and thus somehow inferior. Considering our future goals, we realize we may have to face this type of criticism again, but we both feel strongly that literature should be judged on its own merits and not on the gender of the author.

This experience was definitely the highlight of our undergraduate education. The rewards of this experience were far greater than any research paper could have possibly offered. Perhaps the most important lesson we learned is the great amount of dedication that is required of a good educator. This experience has given us a new appreciation and respect for the teaching profession. This new perspective has changed our attitudes as students as well, by making us more aware of the symbiotic nature of education. We hope to use this experience as a foundation for our future endeavors.

## Bibliography of Class Readings

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Woods, Una. "The Quibbler." Stories by Contemporary Irish Women. Eds. Daniel J. Casey and Linda M. Casey. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1990.

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# Appendix A

SPRING 1995 SYLLABUS  
**HONRS 390H: Contemporary Irish Literature**

Thursday 2:00 - 3:50 p.m.  
BB 309

Instructors: Michele Griegel (284-7992) 00mlgriegel  
Michelle Peresie (282-0481) 00mrperesie  
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Cheryl Bove (285-8381)

**PURPOSE**

This course will focus on contemporary Irish Literature since the turn of the century. Several themes will be explored throughout the semester, with special emphasis on the uniqueness of the Irish experience.

We are teaching this course as the culmination of our Honors Thesis. Dr. Cheryl Bove will serve as the faculty mentor and participate in class discussions. All three of us will be assessing your assignments; however, it will be Dr. Bove's responsibility to assign the final grades.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

Students will be required to write one research paper which will be due near the end of the semester. The paper must be 8-10 pages in length, double-spaced typed. The topic of the paper must cover a theme that will be discussed in class. A student may do a detailed examination of a specific author, movement, facet of Irish life or culture, etc. For this paper, we strongly suggest that the student use examples from the literature that we will read in class. However, if the student wishes, she/he can use reading that not been included in the syllabus.

Students will also be expected to complete a creative project / oral presentation based on some facet of Irish history and culture. The presentations should be approximately ten minutes in length. Originality and creativity are strongly encouraged.

**EXPECTATIONS**

In order to fully benefit from this course, attendance and active participation in class discussion is **expected**. Given the small size of the class, students will be expected to complete all reading assignments in order to be prepared for that day's discussion.

## GRADING POLICY

Research Paper	40pts
Creative Project/Presentations	40pts
Participation	<u>20pts</u>
	100pts

We will use the standard Ball State grading scale.

## REQUIRED TEXTS

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man - James Joyce

"Translations" - Brian Friel (on reserve)

Lies of Silence - Brian Moore

Short Story Collection - available at Hiatt Printing

## CLASS SCHEDULE AND READINGS

**January 12:** \*Introduction (discussion of syllabus, guidelines, requirements, and policies of the class)

\*Students' perceptions / stereotypes of Ireland

**January 19:** \*Major issues in Irish history

**January 26:** \*Nationalism

\*Irish Literary Renaissance and Celtic Revival

\*Celtic Myth

Assignment: Poetry of Yeats (nationalism)

"Translations" - Brian Friel

"Ivy Day in the Committee Room" - James Joyce

**February 2:** (celebration of Celtic holiday)

\*Joyce's Portrait as innovation

-style, theme, etc

Assignment: Portrait of an Artist - Joyce: Chapters 1-2

**February 9:** \*Major themes in Portrait  
-coming of age

Assignment: Portrait - Joyce: Chapters 3-5

**February 16:** \*Coming of Age

Assignment: "A Cow in the House" - Benedict Kiely  
"Weep for our Pride" - James Plunkett  
excerpts from The Country Girls - Edna O'Brien  
and Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha - Roddy Doyle

**February 25:** \*Family relationships

Assignment: "Life Drawing" - Bernard Mac Laverty  
"Lilacs" - Mary Lavin  
"Water from the Well" - Brian Power  
"All Fall Down" - Helen Lucy Burke

**March 2:** \*Research paper topics due / presentation topics  
\*Male / Female relationships

Assignment: "Orange Horses" - Maeve Kelly  
"Housekeeper's Cut" - Clare Boylan  
"The Quibbler" - Una Woods  
"Losing" - Kate Cruise O'Brien

**March 16:** (celebration of Saint Patrick's Day!)  
\*Role of Women in Ireland / Feminism (Dr. Onkey lecture)  
\*Mother Ireland (video) - view to prior to class

Assignment: "A Scandalous Woman" - Edna O'Brien  
"A Kind of Scar" - Eavan Boland  
"A Belfast Woman" - Mary Beckett  
"Cathleen Ni Houlihan" - W.B. Yeats  
excerpts from the 1937 Irish Constitution  
"Sex and Nation" - Geraldine Meaney

**March 23:** \*Censorship Issues  
-effect of Catholic Church  
-effect of new liberalism

Assignment: excerpts from Banned In Ireland

**March 30:** \*Sex in Ireland

Assignment: "Sister Imelda" - Edna O'Brien  
"Falling Rocks, Narrowing Road, Cul de Sac, Stop" - Sean O'Faolain  
"A Pot of Soothing Herbs" - Julia O'Faolain  
"The Miler" - Bryan MacMahon

**April 6:** \*Northern Ireland  
-past and present

Assignment: "Naming the Names" - Anne Devlin  
"The Wall Reader" - Fiona Barr  
"A Minor Incident" - Maura Treacy

**April 13:** \*\*\*\* Research Paper Due \*\*\*\*  
\*Northern Ireland con't

Assignment: view "In the Name of the Father" in class

**April 20:** \*Northern Ireland con't

Assignment: Lies of Silence - Brian Moore

**April 27:** ORAL PRESENTATIONS

# Appendix B



REVISED SYLLABUS  
**HONRS 390H: Contemporary Irish Literature**

Thursday 2:00 - 3:50 p.m.  
BB 309

Instructors: Michele Griegel (284-7992) 00mlgriegel  
Michelle Peresie (282-0481) 00mrperesie  
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Cheryl Bove (285-8381)

**PURPOSE**

This course will focus on contemporary Irish Literature since the turn of the century. Several themes will be explored throughout the semester, with special emphasis on the uniqueness of the Irish experience.

We are teaching this course as the culmination of our Honors Thesis. Dr. Cheryl Bove will serve as the faculty mentor and participate in class discussions. All three of us will be assessing your assignments; however, it will be Dr. Bove's responsibility to assign the final grades.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

Students will be required to write two short page papers focusing on specific themes or aspects of the literature of the class. The papers must be 2-3 pages in length, double spaced typed. While these papers can discuss a general topic, students must comment on how the topic is represented in the literature.

Students will also be expected to complete a creative project / oral presentation based on some facet of Irish history and culture. The presentations should be approximately ten minutes in length. Originality and creativity are strongly encouraged.

The final examination will consist of an essay. Possible questions will be provided to the students approximately one week before the test.

**EXPECTATIONS**

In order to fully benefit from this course, attendance and active participation in class discussion is **expected**. Given the small size of the class, students will be expected to complete all reading assignments in order to be prepared for that day's discussion.

## GRADING POLICY

Short Papers	50 pts.
Presentation/Creative Project	20 pts.
Final Exam	20 pts.
Participation	<u>10 pts.</u>
	100 pts.

We will use the standard Ball State grading scale.

## REQUIRED TEXTS

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man - James Joyce  
"Translations" - Brian Friel  
Irish readings collection - available at Hiatt Printing

## CLASS SCHEDULE AND READINGS

**January 12:**      \*Introduction (discussion of syllabus, guidelines,  
                                 requirements, and policies of the class)  
                         \*Students' perceptions / stereotypes of Ireland  
                         \*Introduction to Ireland and its people (video)

**January 19:**      \*Major issues in Irish history

Assignment: Each student must bring in at least one event or historical  
topic that interests them and present it to the class.

**January 26:**      \*Nationalism  
                         \*Irish Literary Renaissance and Celtic Revival  
                         \*Celtic Myth

Assignment: Proclamation of 1916  
"Translations" - Brian Friel  
"Cathleen Ni Houlihan" - W.B. Yeats

**February 2:** (celebration of Celtic holiday)

\*Joyce's Portrait as innovation  
-style, theme, etc.

Assignment: Portrait of the Artist - Joyce: Chapters 1-2

**February 9:** \*Major themes in Portrait

Assignment: Portrait - Joyce: Chapters 3-5  
Each student must present on a theme or character that occurs in the novel.

**February 16:** \*Coming of Age

Assignment: "A Cow in the House" - Benedict Kiely  
excerpts from The Country Girls - Edna O'Brien

**February 25:** \*Relationships  
\*PAPER DUE

Assignment: "Life Drawing" - Bernard Mac Laverty  
"Orange Horses" - Maeve Kelly  
"All Fall Down" - Helen Lucy Burke  
possibly a Beckett play (Waiting for Godot)

**March 2:** \*Relationships con't

Assignment: "Sister Imelda" - Edna O'Brien  
"Falling Rocks, Narrowing Road, Cul de Sac,  
Stop" - Sean O'Faolain

**March 16:** (celebration of Saint Patrick's Day!)

\*Censorship Issues  
-effect of Catholic Church  
-effect of new liberalism  
\*Mother Ireland (video)

Assignment: excerpts from Banned In Ireland  
\*\*\*Presentation topics due!!!!

**March 23:**            \*Role of Women in Ireland / Feminism (Dr. Onkey lecture)

Assignment: "A Scandalous Woman" - Edna O'Brien  
              "A Kind of Scar" - Eavan Boland  
              "A Belfast Woman" - Mary Beckett  
              excerpts from the 1937 Irish Constitution

**March 30:**            \*Northern Ireland  
                              -past and present  
              \*"Tyranny of the Majority" (video)

Assignment: Each student must write a one page reaction to a current event in Northern Ireland and present it to the class.

**April 6:**             \*Northern Ireland con't

Assignment: "Naming the Names" - Anne Devlin  
              "The Wall Reader" - Fiona Barr  
              "A Minor Incident" - Maura Treacy

**April 13:**            \*Northern Ireland con't  
                              \***PAPER DUE**  
                              -view "In the Name of the Father" in class

**April 20:**    ORAL PRESENTATIONS

**April 27:**    ORAL PRESENTATIONS / Evaluations

**FINAL EXAM**